United Nations A/54/PV.85

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

85th plenary meeting
Monday, 20 December 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Floods and mudslides in Venezuela

The President: Before turning to the item on our agenda for this morning, may I, on behalf of all the members of the Assembly, extend deepest sympathy to the Government and the people of Venezuela for the tragic loss of life and extensive material damage that have resulted from the recent floods and mudslides.

May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any request for help by the Government and people of Venezuela.

Mr. Bivero (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should simply like to say that the Government of Venezuela greatly appreciates the message of solidarity and sympathy that you, Mr. President, have just expressed on behalf of all the members of the General Assembly regarding the tragic losses suffered in my country. As you said, Sir, a very great tragedy has occurred in Venezuela as a result because of the persistent rains that have fallen throughout the year in the central part of the country, which, on 16 December, led to massive flooding and mudslides in the central mountain range, affecting densely populated regions, particularly the central coastal regions near the capital city and where the country's main airport and port are located.

From information being coordinated through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it is estimated that over 150,000 people have been affected by that natural phenomenon, and an estimate of the number of deaths, which is still tentative, is over 2,000. The coordination effort for international assistance began immediately. We have received great evidence of solidarity from Member States, and I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one for the messages of solidarity and the material assistance and human resources that they have provided to help my country deal with the situation. Prolonged efforts will be required if we are to recover from the situation as it stands now. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has, through its warning mechanisms, conveyed the status of the situation, and we appeal to all friendly countries to remain in contact regarding the most pressing needs of international assistance.

Once again, I wish simply to express my sincere gratitude for the sympathy expressed today. Again, we want to thank all Member States for their solidarity and assistance in this tragic situation affecting my country.

Agenda item 38 (*continued*)

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

00-21766 (E)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Mr. Tomka (Slovakia): Strengthening the Security Council, as well as enhancing its representativeness and credibility, remains the central task of any serious effort at reforming the United Nations. It is in no way a simple task. The inability of the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform to make any significant progress with regard to cluster 1 issues since January 1994, when its work began, proves the complexity of the issue, as well as the fundamental divergence of views, reflecting different national interests and different regional perceptions. While there is general agreement that the Security Council should be expanded and thus reflect the new political realities in the global scene, as well as the increase in the general membership during the last three decades, there is no convergence of views on which category of membership should actually be enlarged or on how such enlargement should take place.

It is quite obvious that the issue of permanent membership and the right of the veto lies at the core of the problem. If Member States were able to find common ground on this issue — that is, agree on modalities for the enlargement of this category or agree not to increase that kind of membership — we would be much closer to reaching a final formula for Security Council reform.

There are several risks related to a possible enlargement in the permanent membership category to which we should not turn a blind eye. In our view, some important facts have been overlooked in this regard. The category of permanent membership was not designed or intended by the United Nations Charter's authors to be based on the simple principle of equitable geographical representation. It has specific parameters, determined by the political circumstances of the new global order that emerged after the Second World War. The five permanent members were chosen on an ad hoc basis, as they were believed to have immense military and economic resources as well as the political will to take the lead in handling all matters of peace and security.

Though we may argue about the continuing relevance of this concept on the threshold of a new century, or about the actual capability and willingness of its current members to play the role envisaged for them by the United Nations Charter, it is a fact that by ignoring the nature of this concept we risk enlarging this category in a way which is incompatible with its unique parameters — in other words, we might take the wrong approach, with unpredictable consequences for the functioning of an enlarged Security Council in the future.

The two-stage approach proposed by some, under which the General Assembly would as a first step decide to enlarge the permanent category by a specific number of seats, and then, at a later stage, make known the identity of the permanent members, is, in our view, the wrong approach. It is difficult to justify the act of signing a blank cheque without knowing to whom the check will be given.

I would like to point out that there has not yet been any serious discussion on clear criteria for selecting new permanent members. I believe that the determination of such criteria and their strict application are very important prerequisites if the parameters of this unique category are to be complied with and preserved. Otherwise, the continued existence of the permanent category might no longer make sense. We should not lose sight of this aspect, since even the criteria for the membership of non-permanent members, as is set out in Article 23 of the United Nations Charter, are not always treated seriously. As has become clear in recent years, geography has become more important than the actual contribution of the potential member to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the United Nations.

The regional aspects of the possible enlargement of the permanent category and the notion of regional rotational arrangements also have given rise to some concerns. Rotating permanent seats can hardly be considered permanent. In reality, they would be semi-permanent, provided that rotating members would have the right of veto. Without the veto power, this would simply create a new category of more frequently rotating non-permanent members, which might be interesting and worthy of further discussion. Nevertheless, this would be another item on the agenda of Security Council reform.

Potential new permanent members should be capable of assuming not only regional but also, and more importantly, global responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. There are a number of regional organizations dealing with the maintenance of international peace and security, but the United Nations is the only global forum to do so. Placing too much emphasis on regional aspects in connection with the permanent membership of the Security Council could lead to the fragmentation of the global character of this unique body.

In order to be fair, the veto power must be extended to potential new permanent members in order to avoid

discrimination between the original permanent members and the new ones, since the veto is an essential element of permanent membership. However, the veto itself is a crucial issue in Security Council reform. Although originally designed to foster unity and promote the quest for an understanding among the great Powers, the veto turned out to be an oft-misused tool, both in the ideological battle among bitter rivals during the cold war and in the pursuit of narrow national interests. Even now, the veto and its latent threat sometimes paralyse the Security Council, preventing it from taking effective action on behalf of Member States. This could lead to the erosion of the authority of the Security Council and consequently of its central role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is very unlikely that a great number of the "owners" of the veto power would rectify the situation. I am afraid that, on the contrary, the Security Council might become a mere discussion club, unable to act swiftly and decisively. Moreover, the current scope of application of the veto raises a number of concerns of a legal nature. The rules of procedure of the Security Council have failed to clarify the scope of application of the veto in the last decades and therefore remain provisional.

Slovakia recognizes as legitimate the efforts to secure an adequate position in an enlarged Security Council made by certain countries which are capable of assuming global responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The aspirations of the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean region to ensure their appropriate representation in an enlarged Security Council are also fully understandable.

The core of the problem, in our view, is an increasingly different perception of the Council's legitimacy, which is affected, first, by the nature and composition of the Council and, secondly, by the degree to which Council's members are perceived to take into account in their deliberations the interests of other Member States. There is a growing suspicion on the part of Third World countries regarding what they perceive to be domination of the Security Council by the western Powers. It is they who, since at least 1979, have been in the forefront of a drive to increase their influence in the Council. Nevertheless, the strong competition among each of these continents for the proposed new permanent seats, the question of rotation and disagreements over the veto make it very unlikely that concrete results will be reached in the foreseeable future. As I have already suggested, a possible increase in the permanent category is interlinked with a number of concerns, and we should carefully consider their implications for the future functioning of a new Council.

We believe that in order to keep the United Nations abreast of our rapidly changing world, Security Council reform should focus on the issues on which we are most likely to find common ground. If there is no agreement on other categories of membership, Slovakia is ready to support, at this stage, expansion of the non-permanent category only. The size of the enlarged Security Council would then depend on the scenario eventually agreed to by Member States.

A considerable convergence of views has emerged on a number of issues concerning the working methods and transparency of the work of the Security Council, which are contained in cluster II. My country supports efforts aimed at improving the working methods and enhancing the transparency of the work of the Council. At the same time, the measures already adopted by the Council should be fully and effectively implemented. We also believe that the progress already made on cluster II issues should not be a hostage to the stalemate in cluster I.

In conclusion, let me express, on behalf of the delegation of Slovakia, our appreciation of the work of the Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform, namely that of its former Chairman, Mr. Didier Opertti, and of the Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Hans Dahlgren and Ambassador John de Saram, for the remarkable manner in which they conducted the discussions of the Working Group.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me to express our appreciation to your predecessor, the Chairman of the Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Related Matters, and his two Vice-Chairmen on the efforts they made to reach a consensus reflecting international opinion on reform and expansion of the Security Council, particularly in the light of the current international situation.

We should also like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your continued efforts to promote the role of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The economic and political developments in international relations; the far-reaching changes that have taken place, particularly in the wake of the end of the cold war; and the accession of many new States to the membership of the United Nations all have made it imperative that the Security Council be reformed, its membership increased and its methods of work and activities made more effective in the discharge of the mandate entrusted to it by the Charter of the United Nations.

Although six years have passed since the Working Group was created, and there have been many comprehensive meetings and deliberations, as well many periodic reports reflecting the results of these meetings, clear differences remain as to the size of the proposed increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent seats in the Security Council, the equitable and just geographic distribution of seats, the sovereign equality of States and the need to ensure democracy and transparency in the Council's procedures and methods of work, including in its decision-making processes. Thus the debate needs to be redirected in a comprehensive and harmonious way to ensure the common political interests of all States.

The continuing under-representation of non-aligned States in the Council — given that the majority of the Member States of this international organization are non-aligned States — creates an imbalance in international relations. Therefore, we support all efforts to rectify this imbalance by promoting and, indeed, achieving a better, more just representation of these States in the Council, so as to reflect their important, influential role in current international affairs.

While we attach great importance to the role of the Security Council in tackling many issues pertaining to international peace and security, we also support calls for promoting consultation and coordination with those Member States concerned with issues before it, taking into account the security, political, economic and social interests of these States.

In this context, we support the proposal set forth in the working paper presented by the Group of Arab States to reserve a permanent Council seat for the Arab States of Asia and Africa. It would be filled on a rotating basis through the cooperation and coordination of the Groups of Asian and African States. The seat would be in addition to these Groups' non-permanent representation on the Council.

We would like to express our appreciation of the positive measures that have been taken by the Security Council in the past few years to improve its methods of work. In particular we appreciate the procedure of holding open meetings to deliberate on the positions and proposals of States on relevant issues. We call for the promotion of such measures in a framework of objectivity, so that the Council's methods, consultations and procedures can be institutionalized.

We also support proposals for a review of the use of the veto in order to limit and rationalize its use and ensure that the majority is not prevented from taking decisions reflecting the positions of the international community vis-à-vis ongoing problems.

We also call for a regular, comprehensive and objective review of the Security Council's activities so that the nature of the challenges facing the implementation of its resolutions and objectives can be studied — such challenges as continued conflicts, occupation and aggravated humanitarian situations in many regions of the world. In this context, there must be better coordination and consultation between the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice and regional organizations. We believe that such coordination can be most useful in containing conflict and strife.

In conclusion, we want the Security Council to be more representative, more democratic and more transparent and its work more credible. In this way, it can fully take up its historic and legal responsibilities and express the true current economic and political situation.

Mr. Pham Binh Minh (Viet Nam): Viet Nam attaches great importance to agenda item 38, entitled "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". Over the last six years commendable efforts have been made with a view to bringing this question to a satisfactory outcome.

We are now at a critical stage in our vigorous efforts to achieve a reformed and expanded Security Council, more transparent and democratic in its work, more accountable and representative in its membership. The most outstanding point to note is the general agreement of the Member States on the need to reform the working methods and to expand the membership of the Security Council. However, there remain major differences of views among the Member States. The

whole process is truly very complex and challenging. But we strongly believe that the current impasse must be broken if the common aspiration of the international community to a democratic and accountable Security Council is to be heeded.

The objective of this exercise surely is to bring the Council more in tune with the economic and political realities of our time and to come to grips with the challenges of the next century. Council reform will be durable and fruitful only if it fully reflects the principles of the sovereign equality of Member States, equitable geographical distribution, accountability, democratization and transparency in the Council's working methods and procedures, including in its decision-making processes.

The genuine legitimacy of the Council's decisions relies heavily on the degree of accountability of the Council to the membership of the United Nations. Our delegation shares the view that the reform process must strengthen mechanisms to enable Council members, especially the permanent members, to act in the most responsible manner on behalf of all Member States.

On this occasion my delegation wishes to offer some brief comments on the two crucial elements of the reform exercise under consideration.

On the question of the expansion of the membership of the Council, we support the proposals to increase the number of seats in both categories, permanent and non-permanent. Viet Nam shares the overwhelming view that developing countries must have adequate representation on the Council. This need is underscored by the fact that most of the issues that today fall within the Council's authority arise in the developing world or involve vital interests of the developing countries. On the other hand, we also find it reasonable that new permanent seats should be allocated to industrialized countries that are willing to undertake greater commitments to and responsibility for the work of the United Nations.

In our view, five new permanent seats should be added to the Council membership. Given that there are quite a number of countries which may be eligible to become new permanent members of a reformed and expanded Security Council, Viet Nam is flexible with regard to the proposal to work out rotation arrangements that will allow more countries to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of the work of the Council, as well as of the United Nations. Although it is true that no magic figure can be found to accommodate every Member State, our delegation believes that a reformed Council of about 26 members could make the Council more representative and still ensure the requirement for efficiency.

Any formula for reform will fail to be satisfactory if the utilization of the veto power is not duly dealt with. We welcome the restraints exerted in recent years by the permanent members of the Council concerning the veto right. In this respect, our delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the proposal that this power should be used by the permanent members only on issues that fall under the provisions embodied in Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, with a view to its final elimination.

Pending the total elimination of the veto power, Viet Nam shares the view that new permanent members of the Council should enjoy this right in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality. This will also help to redress the inherent imbalance of power between the developed and the developing countries in the Council.

On the eve of a new millennium, it is high time that more vigorous efforts be called for to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council. It is important to underline the need for all Member States to address this question in a constructive and forward-looking manner. It is our fervent hope that when the Working Group reconvenes next year, we shall be in a position more conducive to embarking on concrete efforts to move the exercise further ahead. Towards this end, my delegation looks forward to making constructive contributions to the work of the Working Group.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is again debating one of the most important issues before it: the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters.

At the outset, I wish to express our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and to the two Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassadors Dahlgren and De Saram, for their sincere efforts and the responsible work they undertook in a spirit of transparency. The report before us this morning is the fruit of their labours. It reflects our collective efforts over the past 12 months.

Six years have elapsed since discussion of this item began. At this point, the inevitable question is: What has been achieved so far in reforming the Security Council

and in improving its standing and role? The answer is: nothing, besides perhaps the marginalization of the Security Council and an erosion of its fundamental role in maintaining international peace and security, as situations require. Since the end of the cold war, hopes had been pinned on the reform of the United Nations, including the Security Council, as well as on an increase in the membership of the Council, in order to obtain a more just and democratic representation in this international Organization.

There has been great enthusiasm for this issue within the Non-Aligned Movement. All the Movement's conferences have addressed it with the utmost gravity, because the Movement is fully aware that, despite international developments and the vast increase in the number of States Members of the United Nations, those States do not enjoy genuine representation commensurate with their number, international influence and desire to express their legitimate interests. Furthermore, Germany and Japan, following major changes on the international scene, feel the importance of obtaining permanent membership in the Security Council. An important role has also emerged for Italy in seeking a third way between North and South. There seems to be no prospect, however, for an imminent solution likely to achieve consensus within the international Organization in this respect.

Throughout the past year, the debate in the General Assembly and the Working Group has revealed deep-seated differences between the permanent members of the Security Council and those States seeking to make the Council more democratic and transparent, particularly on the issues of expanding permanent and non-permanent membership and the use of the veto.

On the question of reforming of the Security Council, the voice of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement cannot be ignored, since they represent fully 80 per cent of this Organization's membership. While their interests in expanding and reforming the Security Council cannot be set aside, the demands of the African and Arab States must also be heeded. They have drafted working papers agreed upon at ministerial summit meetings and conferences, in which they seek to enhance their contribution to reactivating the United Nations and all its bodies. Moreover, the demands of Asian and other States cannot be ignored. Their interests have been clearly expressed in their formal statements on Security Council reform and expansion.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic wishes once again to reaffirm the positions we have reiterated throughout the various phases of the debate. We wish in particular to reaffirm our commitment to the positions expressed by the Group of Arab States in two letters, the most recent of which is dated 2 February 1998. Both of these stress the following:

First, the composition of the Security Council must be truly democratic and reflect the increase in the number of States Members of the Organization.

Secondly, the membership of the Security Council must be increased to no fewer than 26 members. In other words, no fewer than 11 new members must be added. This is fully consistent with the position set forth by the Non-Aligned Movement.

Thirdly, if permanent membership of the Security Council is to be increased, the Group of Arab States demands a fully fledged permanent seat, to be rotated among Arab States based on the criteria used within the Group, as well as within the framework of consultations with the African and Asian Groups of States, to which all members of the Arab Group belong.

We believe that the use of the veto must be limited and rationalized as a first step towards the elimination of that right. In this regard, my delegation wonders about the logic behind the use of the veto in the case of a draft resolution before the Council that has received 14 out of 15 votes in favour. Would the use of the veto be in line with the principles of democracy, equality and just representation? Would it be in line with the interests of the United Nations and the achievement of peace, security and justice in the world?

On this basis, we believe that the veto right must be rationalized, because there is no need to use it when a draft resolution before the Security Council obtains majority support without hegemony exercised by any party. We reconfirm once again the position of the Non-Aligned Movement and of many other States on the question of the veto.

The Syrian delegation welcomes the statement you made, Mr. President, in opening the debate on this item, namely the importance of and need for conducting future debates within the Open-ended Working Group on equitable representation in the Security Council, because we believe it to be the appropriate forum for our deliberations.

Reforming the Security Council and expanding its membership must be an indivisible part of a joint and complementary effort where the principles of sovereign equality among States and equitable geographic distribution are respected, as is the need to ensure transparency, responsibility and democracy in the working methods of the Security Council, including consultation and decision-making. Non-member States must be made aware of the issues before the Security Council and of the results of deliberations and resolutions thereon.

My delegation calls once again for democratic procedures to ensure true democracy in decision-making in the Security Council. We reiterate that we are fully prepared to cooperate with you, Mr. President, and with all those States that aspire to these common interests and objectives.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): My delegation is pleased to address the Assembly on the vital issue of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council. As one of the delegations that first introduced the issue at the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly in 1979, we are firmly committed to the goal of achieving a Council that is more democratic, transparent, effective, accountable and relevant to current global realities.

Six years have elapsed since the inception of the Open-ended Working Group, and we now stand at the threshold of a new millennium. It is a matter of some regret and concern that we have failed to reach agreement on one of the most critical issues before the Organization. This leads one to question the degree of sincerity that lies at the core of our efforts in this regard.

We note that while some progress and general convergence of views on cluster II issues relating to working methods and transparency of the Council's work has been achieved, as manifest in the new practices of the Council, substantial differences in views still remain on cluster I — the acrimonious issue of its expansion and composition. This, however, is not surprising, given the complexities of the issue, the sensitivities involved and the long-term implications.

My delegation wishes to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his efforts to reinvigorate discussions within the Working Group. The adoption by consensus of General Assembly resolution 53/30, which established that decisions on Security Council reform must be adopted by the affirmative votes of two thirds of the membership of the United Nations, ensures that our proceedings on the question of Council reform will be governed by respect for the provisions of the Charter. We also believe that Mr. Opertti's letter of 22 June 1999 contributed much towards the airing and exchange of views.

In support of this process, I wish to briefly state the position of my Government on a few of the issues raised. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Bhutan fully subscribes to the Movement's stated positions on the question of Security Council reform and expansion. We believe that expansion of the Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories is imperative. Expansion in the membership of both categories must be responsive to the changed global political and economic climate. Equally essential is the adequate representation, both as permanent and non-permanent members, of developing countries, which have long endured unjust marginalization within the Council.

With regard to the creation of rotating permanent seats, my delegation believes that decisions on such modalities must be arrived at within regional groups. We understand and respect the prerogative of the African Group to pursue this model, but believe that the same may not necessarily be suitable for all other regions. Bhutan is also concerned that such an arrangement could create complex strata of hierarchy within the Council, leading to greater dissatisfaction among members.

Bhutan recognizes that the question of the veto is intrinsically linked to the issue of expansion of the Council. In fact, it lies at the very heart of much of our discussions and cannot be de-linked from the issue of reform and expansion of the Council. We fully share the views of the Non-Aligned Movement that the veto should be curtailed with a view to its elimination and that the Charter should be amended so that initially the veto power would only apply to actions taken under Chapter VII. However, the reality is that any proposal on the veto may be subject to the veto itself. Thus, for the interim, it is our view that new permanent members of the Council should be entitled to the same rights and privileges enjoyed by the current five permanent members. Consequently, we would be unable to support any attempts that would lead to further stratification of the Council's membership.

While Bhutan is flexible on the exact size of an expanded Council, we support the view that total membership should be increased by no less than 11. It is

clear that developing countries today lack adequate representation in the permanent category of Council members. The expansion should therefore address this grave inadequacy and accommodate the demands of under-represented regional groups.

All these aspects should be subject to periodic review in the future, in order to ensure the Council's continued relevance. We are convinced that the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform and expansion is the appropriate forum for consideration of these matters. Both cluster I and cluster II issues should continue to be considered in tandem.

My delegation is confident that under your leadership, Mr. President, and with the demonstrated competence of the distinguished co-Vice-Chairmen, discussions will proceed in conformity with relevant Assembly resolutions, fully respecting the need for transparency and open-endedness. We look forward to contributing to the process.

We realize that the debate on this issue has been protracted and difficult. It is often said that change, no matter how positive, is always accompanied by some pain and discomfort. We hope the Working Group will have the courage to surmount these difficulties in order to make real progress in the coming year.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to offer our warmest thanks to you, Sir, for giving us the opportunity to take part in a debate that is important for most delegations. The best proof of this is the length of the list of speakers. It was not long ago that my delegation last addressed the various issues we are covering today; therefore we will try to be very brief.

In the Open-ended Working Group we will participate actively in the discussion regarding the equitable distribution of Security Council seats and the expansion of its membership. The Working Group is the best forum for putting on the table all issues relating to Council reform because it will the opportunity and all the time needed to debate these issues with the greatest objectivity and transparency.

The reform of the Security Council is a subject of importance for all delegations. We live under new circumstances and we have a new world order. We need to see the principle of equity applied to the Security Council. This is extremely important for all the States Members of the United Nations.

More than half a century has passed since the Security Council was established. It is necessary to pause and review its various decisions and resolutions. There are many gaps and imbalances in the work of the Council as compared with the ideal role we would like it to play. We should realize that many countries have gained independence and have become Members of the United Nations, thereby forming an overwhelming majority. This is in addition to the end of the cold war. Therefore, the Security Council must provide equitable representation to all such States.

I would like to repeat here, without going into detail, that my delegation supports the view of the Group of Arab States in this regard. This is a position that we have explained in meetings of the Open-ended Working Group. We also support the position of the Non-Aligned Movement, which represents the majority of the Member States of this Organization.

In addressing the issue of the reform of the United Nations system we have to conform above all to the principle of absolute transparency. In order to be successful, reform of the Security Council must occur in an atmosphere of transparency. It is important that all debates be characterized by transparency. Indeed, transparency is the best tool and format for expressing the views of all States without discrimination. My delegation would therefore like to reassert the importance of upholding the principles of transparency and democracy in debating reform of the Security Council.

Many peoples have suffered as a result of the exercise of the veto power. This power goes against the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Aiming at establishing democracy and transparency in the work of the Council, we call for a limitation of the power of the veto to matters that fall under Chapter VII, with a view to the eventual elimination of the veto altogether.

We hope that all interested States will take part in the serious work of the Open-ended Working Group on the reform of the Security Council in view of the importance of the subject. We would not continue to live with a Damoclean sword hanging over our heads. There is a need for very lengthy discussions, which are best carried out within the Open-ended Working Group.

Before concluding, I would like to reassert that any reform process should be full, complete and unanimous. I would also like to reassert that my delegation will

cooperate with you, Mr. President, and will contribute in a positive way to the work of the Working Group.

Mr. ul-Haque (Pakistan): Discussions on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters are in their seventh year, and therefore it would be useful to take stock.

Our deliberations over all these years have established beyond any shadow of a doubt that there are deep and abiding differences among the membership on a host of issues, including permanent membership, the use of the veto and the total membership of the Security Council. There are many issues that I would have liked to take up today, but due to the constraints of time I will confine myself to recapitulating briefly our perceptions of only a few aspects of this complex subject.

Pakistan believes that the reform of the Security Council is a cardinal issue of major political and strategic significance for the international community. We are of the view that the membership of the United Nations, which works to promote democracy, participation, transparency and accountability in the world, must be animated by the same principles in deciding upon the issues relating to the membership and the work of the Council. Our objective must be the evolution of a transparent, democratic and effective Security Council that enjoys the support and confidence of the membership of the United Nations.

There are a few countries which appear to believe that the only yardstick by which progress on this issue can be measured is the achievement of their ambition to become a permanent member of the Council. It is from this perspective alone that they would like to judge the outcome of this whole exercise. In their view, if they are not anointed as permanent members, progress has not been and cannot be made. Their desire to seek permanent status on the Council is not motivated by altruistic or noble sentiments. It is an undisguised grab for power and privilege.

That is the crux of the problem. The international community is being asked to embrace the so-called new realities, and on the coat-tails of these new realities ride other aspirants, who hope to slip into the permanent category of the membership of the Council through genuflection to the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Countries which aspire to permanent membership perhaps believe that they are in some way superior to the vast majority of the membership of the United Nations and that they have a distinctive, different and elevated position. We would like to disabuse them of this notion. The United Nations was created on the basis of the sovereign equality of all States. In the new millennium, the General Assembly cannot be expected to bestow special privileges on some while denying them to the vast majority of nations.

Pakistan firmly believes that the expansion and reform of the Security Council must be based on the principle of the greater good of the entire membership of the United Nations and that all of us must work to eliminate the discriminatory and anti-democratic features of the Security Council instead of strengthening them further. We cannot accept the creation of new and additional centres of power and privilege in the Council to the exclusion of the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Organization. In our view, the concept of permanent membership is inherently discriminatory and goes against the principle of the sovereign equality of all Member States. We must not repeat the mistake made at the time of the establishment of the United Nations, when the victorious Allied Powers secured permanent seats on the Council. The addition of more permanent members would make the Council neither more democratic and representative, nor more transparent and efficient. It would make it more undemocratic, unrepresentative and unresponsive to the concerns of the vast majority.

To put it simply, Pakistan is against any increase in the category of permanent members. Such an increase would serve only to accommodate the interests and ambitions of a few countries and would restrict the participation of the overwhelming majority of the Members of the United Nations in the Council's work. Allow me to note that it is the small and medium-sized countries which constitute the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly. It is they that must be given greater representation in the decision-making processes of the Council, and not those few who seek pelf, prestige, privilege and power to promote their own agendas.

Pakistan is against the creation of a new oligarchy designed to protect and promote the interests of a small number of powerful States. It is ironic that countries which preach democratic values, equality, transparency and full participation in decision-making at the national level reverse themselves and became very vocal in defence of anti-democratic formulas when it comes to promoting their own parochial interests at the United Nations.

The vast majority of the membership has expressed support for the idea that the veto should be eliminated or that, at the very least its use should be limited to decisions under Chapter VII of the Charter. We share the position of the Non-Aligned Movement calling for the eventual elimination of the veto. However, any curtailment of the veto power continues to be opposed by those who enjoy or wish to acquire this power.

The issue of veto is, therefore, intrinsically linked to the reform and expansion of the Security Council. Pakistan believes that the veto power is undemocratic and archaic. It was acquired by a few Member States at the time of the framing of the Charter, when they were basking in the glory of a great victory. However, history is witness to the fact that the veto has invariably been used to protect the political or strategic interests of the veto-wielding Powers. Permanent members have used or threatened to use the veto to block Council decisions on innumerable occasions. The veto has never been used and, by its very nature, can never be used, to promote solutions to problems.

In today's world, no country, however strong or powerful, should be allowed to arrogate to itself the right to veto decisions which it finds unpalatable. While, because of the provisions written into the Charter, it may not be possible to eliminate the veto, the General Assembly, after witnessing for more than half a century initiatives for peace and security being stifled time and again by the use of veto, cannot be expected to create additional obstacles to the effective functioning of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security by adding to the number of veto-wielding countries.

I should note that substantial progress has been recorded over the last few years. For instance, there is general agreement on an increase in the category of non-permanent members of the Security Council. In this connection, I would like to recall the eminently reasonable position of the Non-Aligned Movement that, in the event there can be no agreement on other categories, there should be expansion only in the non-permanent membership for the time being. That, in our view, is the only viable option, and it would also be in keeping with the principle of the sovereign equality of all States and would meet the requirements of equitable geographical distribution.

An increase in the non-permanent category would help remove the major grievances of the general membership at the lack of opportunity to participate in and contribute to the work of the Council. The membership of the United Nations has risen enormously while the size of the Council has remained frozen since 1965. I may mention that in the Asian Group, candidatures for non-permanent seats in the Council have already been announced up to the years 2018-19. This is not merely reflective of the desire of Member States to serve as members of the Council; it underlines the fact that they rarely get an opportunity to do so. This desire, shared by the vast majority of countries, is being held hostage to the selfish and unfair demands of those few who are determined to push for permanent seats on the Council for themselves.

Consensus also largely exists on the need to make the working methods and practices of the Security Council transparent, democratic and participatory. There is considerable scope for making progress in this area.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed efforts by those who are eager to win glory for themselves to find some "quick-fix" formulas for the expansion of the Security Council. This has led at times to the unfortunate practice of conducting negotiations and discussions among a select few, to the exclusion of the large majority of delegations. As a result, we have had to witness many acrimonious exchanges.

Our future consideration of the issues related to the reform and expansion of the Security Council must therefore continue to be based on an open and transparent discussion in the Open-ended Working Group established by the General Assembly. There can be no "quick fixes" or partial solutions to meet self-imposed or artificial deadlines. This subject is vital to all of us, collectively as well as individually.

Mr. President, we are all your friends. We are all ready to help you. We are counting on you to ensure that all Member States participate in the process on an equal footing and that small-group meetings are not organized under the patronage of the presidency, in informal settings, to evolve decisions. Such attempts have not succeeded in the past and, if revived, are bound to fail again.

Pakistan will continue to engage actively in the deliberations of the Open-ended Working Group when it meets next year. We favour the holding of a general debate in the Working Group, which would allow delegations, including mine, to elaborate on their views at greater length on many of the issues that have not been touched upon in this Hall.

The task ahead of you, Mr. President, is both complex and difficult. However, we are confident that with your wisdom, tact and diplomatic skills you will be able to steer our work clear of past pitfalls. We must move collectively towards the goal of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council, in a manner which is acceptable to and serves the interests of all Member States, particularly the weak and the vulnerable countries, which form the vast majority of the membership and for which the United Nations is the court of last appeal.

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea): Reform of the Security Council, like reform of the United Nations as a whole, is one of the top-priority tasks that the international community has been mandated to carry out during the last decade of the twentieth century. As we stand today in the twilight of the century, we cannot but express disappointment and frustration at what little progress we have made over the last six years.

Now that we are about to cross into the twenty-first century, however, we believe that the United Nations is once again called upon to persevere and to make further serious efforts in pursuit of a general agreement on reform of the Security Council, especially since such reform will have a crucial impact on the future of the United Nations and the shaping of the international order in the coming century.

Having said that, let me reflect upon several of the fundamental issues on which any reform of the Security Council will have to be based.

The overarching goal, in our view, remains unchanged: the enhancement of democratic representation, accountability and efficiency in the Security Council. It is true that democratic representation of all 188 Members on the Security Council can be enhanced only by enlarging the membership of the Council, and a consensus seems to have emerged at least on this key point.

Despite intensive deliberations for the last six years, however, there has been no consensus as yet on an expansion package involving such issues as categories and total size of the enlarged Council, qualifications and modalities for the selection of the new membership and the system of periodic review. Enlargement still remains an indispensable component of our overall task, calling for an extra dose of creativity.

With respect to the issue of categories and size of the Council, it is imperative that we ensure, on the one hand, that all Member States be given a fair opportunity to serve on the Council with reasonable frequency, commensurate with their capabilities — actual and potential — to contribute to international peace and security and their willingness to do so.

On the other hand, regardless of whether or when the international community will be able to find optimal answers to the many unresolved questions of permanent membership, we are still prepared to go ahead, for the time being, with the expansion of the non-permanent membership. Non-permanency through periodic elections by definition better guarantees democratic representation on the Security Council.

We also believe that the additional non-permanent seats should be distributed on a more equitable geographical basis. We should take into account all relevant factors, including the evolving geography within each regional group in the post-cold-war era. Given the recent enlargement of the Asian Group membership and its vast geographical coverage, the Asian Group deserves special consideration in the composition of an expanded Council.

Consensus also appears to have emerged on the need for greater transparency in the work of the Security Council, which would certainly imbue the Council with greater democracy and accountability. It would also, in turn, encourage the majority of United Nations Member States to render their full support and contributions to the work of the Council through more active participation. My delegation notes with satisfaction that the Security Council has recently made significant strides in the area of transparency by holding more open briefings and meetings.

For our part, my delegation, in cooperation with other non-permanent members of the Council, took a joint initiative in December 1997 to put forward a number of practical suggestions for transparency measures. These suggestions, along with other views that emerged in the course of the follow-up discussions, are reflected in a conference room paper prepared by the Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group on the working methods of the Security Council and the transparency of its work as well as its decision-making process, contained in document A/53/47.

We remain convinced that, contrary to what many people believe, transparency is not necessarily detrimental to efficiency. In fact, the two can be mutually reinforcing if managed effectively. We should therefore continue to seek parallel and balanced progress on both fronts in the work of the Council.

Let me now turn to the sensitive issue of the decision-making process of the Security Council. It has been my Government's consistent position that the number of veto-holders must not be enlarged. The veto was indeed an exception to the principle of sovereign equality in the special circumstances that prevailed after the Second World War. Even in this post-cold-war era, we have witnessed vetoes' preventing the Council from responding promptly to situations in which its action was required. In our view, the veto power should not be expanded, but rather rationalized.

My delegation also attaches particular importance to the issue of the periodic review of the composition of the Council after its enlargement. Periodic review, to be meaningful, should be undertaken in a substantive manner within a reasonable time-frame.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session in his capacity as Chairman of the Open-ended Working Group and to his two Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador De Saram of Sri Lanka and Ambassador Dahlgren of Sweden, for their excellent leadership in guiding the Working Group during the past year.

My delegation also entertains high expectations, Sir, that next year's session of the Open-ended Working Group will reap fruitful results under your prominent and skilful leadership; indeed, we are all counting on you in this respect. May I assure you of my delegation's commitment and willingness to cooperate with you to make the work of the upcoming session of the Working Group as constructive and fruitful as possible.

Ms. Ramiro Lopez (Philippines): If the Security Council is to remain relevant and effective in addressing international challenges, its capacity to meet them must be enhanced in accordance with present-day realities. It is for this reason that the issue of the reform of the Security Council has been our common interest and remains in the forefront of our agenda.

The position of my delegation on this issue is well known. We would like the Security Council itself, with its wide mandate and leadership role, to be at the centre of change and reform. It should be representative, democratic, transparent and accountable.

The Philippines desires to have an expansion of the Security Council among non-permanent and permanent members alike. The Security Council has not changed and has remained small, unrepresentative and undemocratic despite the increase in United Nations membership to 188 Member States. The gross under-representation of developing countries in the Council is a perfect proof of a deplorable lacuna which needs to be addressed promptly.

The notion of rotating permanent seats is interesting. However, a number of technically and politically difficult issues have to be addressed. For example, the term of each seat and the manner of election, among other things, would have to be worked out. Rotating permanent members without the veto would be no different than non-permanent members that, in effect, rotate every two years. However, the implication of giving the veto to every rotating permanent member, which would create the possibility for every United Nations Member to wield a veto, has to be studied by the Working Group.

As regards the question of additional categories of membership, the idea of creating seats for more frequently rotating non-permanent members is interesting but may not be feasible or may be difficult to implement. It would also create further inequalities within the Council.

The Philippines considers the issue of reform of the veto power to be one of the most enduring and controversial questions before the United Nations. The question of the enlargement of the Council is intrinsically linked to the question of the veto. Our interest in addressing this question goes back over two decades, when the Philippines proposed, among other things, that the unanimity requirement among permanent members be circumscribed. The veto, short of abolition, should be curtailed and rationalized.

In its work on the question of the veto, the Philippines reiterates its proposal that the following considerations be taken into account by the Working Group:

First, the view has been expressed by certain delegations in previous discussions on the veto to the effect that many situations in the Council no longer

address the direct national interests of the veto-holders and are not perceived as having the potential to lead to conflict between the major Powers. There is really no need for the veto most of the time.

Secondly, other sources of tension — such as human rights, economic disputes and the environment, as well as intrastate, as opposed to inter-State, conflicts — are increasingly considered to be factors directly affecting international peace and security. Hence, the consequences and ramifications of Security Council actions or non-action caused by a veto will certainly expand beyond what they were under a more restrictive definition of international peace and security and ultimately affect, for better or worse, the role and perception of the Security Council as the United Nations organ with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. More circumspect use and application of the veto in the context of an expanding Council mandate and definition of international peace and security are an issue which must be taken into account by our Working Group.

Thirdly, we subscribe to the notion that a truly reformed United Nations requires, among other things, greater balance or sharing of responsibilities among United Nations organs in accordance with their respective mandates, particularly between the General Assembly, which has the most comprehensive mandate of any United Nations organ, and the Security Council, due to the growing number of factors now deemed to affect international peace and security and the need for broader-based decision-making based on democratic principles. These are matters we feel the Security Council should be willing to share, in terms of decision-making, with the General Assembly, particularly through the non-use of the veto.

As to the question of extending the veto power to any additional permanent members, the Philippines, in principle, believes that the permanent members should be given the veto power. Otherwise, there would be two categories of permanent members: those with the veto and those without. Nevertheless, my Government hopes that an agreement to limit the veto power will be reached and made applicable to all permanent members, old and new.

The Philippines believes that there should be a periodic review of an enlarged Security Council, which should take place at agreed intervals. The scope should include all matters related to the Council's work, particularly to make its decision-making process more inclusive and transparent. Additional membership could also be considered.

It is the firm view of the Government of the Philippines that a comprehensive package should consist of both expansion and reform elements. Improving the transparency of the Council's working methods and enhancing the participation of non-members in its decision-making process is just as important as increasing its membership.

Six years after the establishment of the Working Group, we are confronted with the same situation with regard to our work, which seems to bring about some degree of despair and frustration. Maybe we should reflect and ask ourselves how our frequent responses of omission have contributed to this sense of frustration.

The United Nations has accomplished many tasks that have seemed impossible at times. Among these is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, on which the United Nations laboured for many, many years. But these agreements have seen the light of day through our perseverance and commitment, so maybe there is hope for our work. Surely our common needs and common longings for peace can transcend our differences in perspective and practice.

Mr. Cunningham (United States of America): The United States strongly supports the ongoing effort to strengthen the Security Council and to enable it to enhance its ability to respond efficiently and effectively to the challenges and opportunities of the new millennium. Council reform will help ensure that the Council more accurately reflects the world's current political, economic and security situation. A reformed Council, viewed as more representative by the States Members of the United Nations, will enjoy enhanced legitimacy as it exercises the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security conferred by the United Nations Charter.

The difficulty we face in attempting to reach consensus on a framework for Security Council reform should not surprise us. The magnitude of the Council's responsibilities and the complexity of the issues with which it is confronted are mirrored in the complexity and scope of the issues directly related to Council reform. Often, these complex and interrelated issues pull in opposing directions, making a workable consensus elusive. For example, the Open-ended Working Group must balance the legitimate desire for greater

representation with the equally compelling need to preserve the Council's ability to react decisively to fast-breaking challenges to international peace and security. The Council is, after all, a quasi-executive body. This is no easy task and we should not pretend that it is.

The fact that all the hard work over the years in the Open-ended Working Group has yet to reach closure is ample testimony to the complex nature of the problem. That having been said, the admitted difficulty of this task cannot be permitted to serve either as an excuse for lessening our shared commitment to reform or for accepting an ill-considered or partial solution merely to bring the work of the Open-ended Working Group to an end. For any issue of fundamental importance to the United Nations — and in our view, Security Council reform clearly qualifies as such an issue — our guiding principle must be: do it right.

The United States believes that the inability of the Open-ended Working Group to reach agreement on a framework for Council reform is not the result of disagreement over any one particular element of the overall reform issue. Nor is it the result of any one member's national position. Likewise, we do not believe that a change in any individual country's position would suddenly yield a clear path to consensus. There are still a number of unresolved issues and mutually incompatible national and regional bloc positions. We believe that attempting to identify a single source for the lack of consensus is fruitless and counterproductive, and serves only to distract the attention of the Working Group from its real and important work.

Without repeating our national position in detail, I should like to say that the United States remains committed to expanding the size of the Council and supports the inclusion of Japan, Germany and representative States from the African, Asian and Latin American regional groups as permanent members. We remain unconvinced that a Council expanded beyond 21 members would retain its ability to function efficiently and effectively. We will oppose any expansion that threatens the ability of the Council to carry out its responsibilities under the Charter. The gravity of those responsibilities is simply too great to risk compromising the Council's ability to meet them.

The United States believes that the future efforts of the Open-ended Working Group might be more productive if they were redirected to include and, perhaps, even to emphasize a more thorough and analytical examination of the possible operations of an expanded Council. Of course, to be meaningful and useful, such an analysis would have to consider different size and composition possibilities for the Council. The United States would, naturally, be willing to be an active and engaged participant in that effort.

Finally, the United States views the strengthening of the Council as only one element — albeit a critical one — in the larger process of strengthening the United Nations in its entirety. We will also continue our efforts to increase the overall efficiency of the United Nations, to limit its financial dependence on a small number of Members and to support the Secretary-General's ongoing reform efforts. Much has already been accomplished, but much remains to be done.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in French*): Our present-day world is going through a period that remains unstable and uncertain. Everything should be done to build a solid basis and new foundations that can ensure peace and promote the development of all the countries of the world. From that standpoint, it is essential that the United Nations be reformed so that it can function well and be able to fulfil its role and attain its objectives.

It is here, in the United Nations, where, in accordance with the principle of the sovereign equality of States, all countries have equal status. It is also here in the United Nations that we advocate the principles of the non-use of force or the threat of force against the independence and sovereignty of States, of the peaceful settlement of disputes and of non-interference in the internal affairs of others. In our opinion, a strong, representative and truly democratic United Nations would enjoy the support, backing and, above all, confidence of all its Member States, including weak and needy countries.

In discussing United Nations reform, it is impossible to ignore the delicate work being done by the Open-ended Working Group on reform of the Security Council. For more than six years, we have been examining the different aspects of the restructuring of the Council — the principle body for the maintenance of international peace and security. To our delegation's regret, the objective of arriving at a global agreement on the sensitive issues — the expansion, composition and working methods of the Council — has not yet been achieved. Nevertheless, we must not give in to discouragement, as Council reform represents a fundamental element of the overall reform of

our Organization and this exercise remains one of the most difficult and complex.

Our position on this issue is known. It has been reaffirmed on many occasions here in the General Assembly as well as in the Open-ended Working Group. Laos is in favour of an increase in the number of both permanent and non-permanent members. With regard to new permanent members, we believe, on the basis of current global realities, that two should come from the industrialized countries and three from the developing countries. We believe that such a formula, while it does not yet have the support of all, could nevertheless provide a basis for discussion in our work in coming years.

As to the increase in the number of non-permanent members, we feel that the idea that Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Europe should each be represented in the new expanded Security Council is interesting and that, like many other formulas, it deserves more thorough consideration.

In the effort to reform the Council, like the other members of the Non-Aligned Movement, we are in favour of transparency in the working methods of the Council. In our view, such transparency, especially in the Council's decision-making process, would allow us all to understand the reasoning behind the decisions taken by the Council and thereby help the Council to earn the trust of all States Members of the Organization.

As we are all aware, this question of Council reform is not a simple one. We must be patient, pursue discussion and, above all, exploit the dynamics we have created. In the end, we believe that, together, we can attain the ultimate goal of restructuring the Council by giving it greater transparency, legitimacy and, above all, credibility.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the current plenary session of the General Assembly and to the opportunity to discuss one of the key and most complex issues that directly affect not only the prospects for the United Nations development, but also the issues of the future structure of the architecture of world security. We consider such discussions to be a principal element of the process of reform of one of the main organs of the United Nations responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Six years ago, when they began actively to work on Security Council reform, the States Members of the United Nations very clearly laid down the structure and institutional framework for discussions. We are not inclined to share the opinion of certain Member States that these were years of fruitless discussion. As we take stock of the twentieth century, this year has shown that the scale and responsibility of tasks facing the United Nations objectively affect the profile of the Security Council. Over the past year, we have witnessed an unprecedented number of open meetings of the Council that, a few years ago, would have been quite unthinkable.

Clearly, any increase in the transparency of the work of the Council will gradually draw an ever-larger number of States into the process of discussing important issues. Only yesterday, it would have seemed unrealistic to expect the substantive summaries of and short briefings on the work of the Council on an Internet web site that were successfully introduced into the Council's practices this year. We should therefore welcome the enhanced substantive daily briefings by the President of the Council and the positive experience of the monthly presidential assessment of the work of the Security Council, to the benefit of its member delegations.

In our view, such positive trends have undoubtedly countered the negative developments in Kosovo, determined the historical role of the United Nations in the independence process of East Timor and helped the Organization to achieve a deeper understanding of and reach effective solutions to the problems of Africa. We must not underestimate these positive trends in the evolution of the Council's work.

However, the evolutionary process in the working methods of the Council should not be cause for self-congratulation. It is an indisputable and widely acknowledged fact that the Security Council is inadequate to the main challenges and geopolitical realities of the contemporary world. This issue is as relevant as ever and is gradually becoming a key to the further evolution of the United Nations. It has become perfectly clear today that, without decisive measures and actions to reform the Council, the universal mechanism for peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and post-conflict reconstruction will grow ever less functional.

The delegation of the Republic of Belarus therefore calls for renewed consideration of all the results of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council and for the drafting of a concrete

programme of urgent action to determine the basic parameters of reform, especially those relating to the quantitative structure of the Council. One of the key elements of this work could be the holding of special open ministerial meetings of the Council devoted to this issue. The most suitable timing for convening such a meeting would be during the general political debate at the millennial session. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus has often noted the potential usefulness of such a meeting.

The position of the Government of Belarus on the questions of Security Council reform is sufficiently clear. Above all, without prejudice to the effectiveness of that organ, we need to ensure equitable geographic representation of Governments in the new structure of the Council, including representatives of the Eastern Europe Group. Undeniably, the developing countries, especially those in Africa, require equitable and adequate representation in the Council's membership. To this end, we assume that any expansion should occur in both categories of Council membership.

In the course of earlier discussion, we have heard rational proposals on the further improvement of the working methods of the Security Council, which the Republic of Belarus supports. This would involve above all an increase in the number of open meetings; the Egyptian proposal that the Council submit reports on its work not only on an annual basis, but also on more immediate issues of its work; the suggestion of Iran on daily press releases on the Council's consultations; and the Indian initiative concerning the Council's preparations of its assessment of its substantive activities.

Special attention needs to be accorded to the question of the veto and other voting procedures. We believe that the right of veto — a powerful decision-making instrument of the cold-war era — should be comprehensively examined.

We are now 11 days from an important threshold in the history of humanity. Will the year 2000 mark a smooth transition to peace and stability, or will the world veer sharply towards civil wars and confrontation? The answer to that question is directly related to the subject under consideration today. The delegation of Belarus is fully resolved to work actively to achieve material progress in Security Council reform.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Colombia attaches great importance to the general debate on this issue, which is of such great significance for Member States. My delegation also eagerly awaits the recommencement of the work of the Open-ended Working Group.

I wish to highlight four essential elements that, in my delegation's opinion, should constitute for this General Assembly, the basis for our consideration of the issue of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters. We will address other critical matters during the general debate that we believe will take place during the sessions of the Working Group.

The accomplishments and limitations of the Security Council are the starting point of our deliberations in the Working Group. Once again the international situation has reminded us that the Organization should not and cannot avoid a real reform of the Security Council. The reform should improve the quality of the Council's decisions and restore legitimacy to this body through an equitable expansion. In particular, the situation in Kosovo has demonstrated that whenever the preponderant Powers avoid the Security Council they compromise the authority of this United Nations organ as the main guarantor of peace and international security. Insisting on de facto reforms in an organ that bases its legitimacy on universal representation dangerously jeopardizes the fundamental principles established in the Charter.

The Working Group must delve into the issue of the veto. It is inadvisable to attempt to reform the composition of the Security Council without dealing in depth with the question of the veto. Recurrent threats to use the veto are what has made this discussion more necessary. As the management of the situation in Kosovo demonstrated, this behaviour has become the main obstacle to the Security Council taking timely decisions to deal with crises.

The Working Group, therefore, must try to resolve two basic considerations. First, what justifies the existence of the veto? Secondly, how is it possible to channel the wishes of the more than 180 Member States that would like to see the veto modified or curtailed?

After six years of deliberations it is clear that there is no consensus on the expansion of the Security Council in the category of permanent members. What is interesting is an emerging tendency in our deliberations

in the course of those years to favour an increase in the number of non-permanent members. The final result of the reform would be disappointing if it were to increase the existing inequalities in representation of developed and developing countries, as well as the existing inequalities in the representation among the developing countries. In order to avoid these inequalities it necessary to strictly respect the dynamics of each region as well as their own proposals for participation.

We will give due consideration to the lessons learned from the work of the Open-ended Working Group during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. Allow me to highlight some of the things we learned. First, we confirmed that the Working Group is the appropriate, necessary and positive setting to discuss and negotiate, with transparency, matters of Security Council reform among all Member States. Secondly, an intense, productive and thorough debate taught us that informal consultations would not have a strong impact on the dynamics of our discussions at this stage, and that thus they could be omitted. Thirdly, we saw that the creativity and originality of the Bureau and especially the President can motivate a greater number of delegations to participate in the deliberations. Finally, we reiterate our conviction that transparency is the essence of trust.

Institutionalization is a very serious matter. It is a decision of a moment that has lasting consequences. Naturally some countries with greater power wish to institutionalize their power in the Organization, just as others want to be included in the club of the powerful. This is rational behaviour, and it is the most intelligent way of perpetuating international power structures. Nonetheless, it is also natural, in a democratic international community based on the principles of equitable geographic representation and the sovereign equality of States, that changes to the collective security system be the result of a genuine general agreement, instead of being imposed. Whatever we do today must be sufficiently visionary to allow for rapid adjustments to the changing realities of the international system and its distribution of power.

Therefore my delegation reiterates that our discussions must take as long as is necessary to build a general agreement, which certainly will be built. A great deal of the credibility of the United Nations is in the hands of the Working Group. It is important, therefore, that we have the opportunity of a general debate when you, Sir, convene the Group. If we allow States to express their views in depth during the meetings of the Working Group, we will see that, in spite of the differences, there are no good or bad positions, but simply national positions.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In the aftermath of the serious tests of the Iraq and Balkan crises, restoration of the Security Council as the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security has become a core task within the overall strengthening of the authority and global role of the United Nations. An overwhelming majority of Member States stressed this during the general debate of the current General Assembly session. The main inference to be drawn from this discussion is that the search for solutions to the most acute international problems should take place solely within the legal framework of the United Nations and be based on respect for the Charter and for the Security Council's prerogatives as stipulated therein. It goes without saying that commitment to comply with the Charter — in deeds, not in words — is the main requirement for any candidate for Security Council membership.

The search for a generally acceptable and viable formula to improve the Council's composition and work while preserving and enhancing its effectiveness has acquired particular importance with regard to situations where there is resort to unilateral use of force, bypassing the Council. The Security Council, reinforced and generally supported by the Member States, is a reliable guarantor against the arbitrary rule of force in global affairs.

On the basis of experience accumulated in the Open-ended Working Group set up by the General Assembly we should proceed with our painstaking efforts to narrow national positions on the key issues of Security Council enlargement in order to reach the broadest possible agreement on this most crucial problem. There should be no artificially imposed time-frames for this endeavour.

The Russian Federation continues to believe that the number of members in an enlarged Security Council should not exceed 20 or 21. We are still convinced that exceeding that limit would have a negative impact on the efficiency of the Council's activities. Within that limit we are open to discussion of any proposals on membership categories for an enlargement of the Council. Our principal position remains unchanged: the enlargement in either membership category should include both industrialized nations and developing countries, and both groups must be ensured the same status. We are convinced that this is absolutely indispensable for

maintaining an overall balance in international relations to uphold the principles of a multipolar world order. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) actions in the Kosovo crisis only strengthened our firm belief that there is no alternative to such an approach to Security Council enlargement.

In this context, for instance, the Russian Federation considers India a strong and worthy candidate for permanent membership in the Security Council should it be decided to enlarge the Council in both categories. There are also strong candidates from Latin America and Africa.

In principle, the Russian Federation does not object to the idea of States occupying new permanent positions on the basis of rotation. Provided that such a formula gains the necessary support, the specific modalities for its application should be considered by the relevant regional groups. As for extending the right of veto to possible new permanent members, a decision in that regard should be taken only after the concrete composition of the enlarged Security Council has been agreed upon.

An inevitable prerequisite for such agreement is the maintenance by the incumbent permanent members of the Security Council of their current status. We flatly reject the thesis that basic principle of the Charter — the concurring votes of the five permanent members — leads to a virtual paralysis of the Council. That thesis distorts reality and plays into the hands of those who advocate the use of military force, sidestepping the Security Council, whether under humanitarian or any other pretexts. The veto has proved to be an irreplaceable tool to ensure that the Council's work is coordinated and that it is able to arrive at balanced decisions within its framework.

The Open-ended Working Group will continue to give serious consideration to the issue of the working methods and procedures of the Security Council. Pragmatism and a rational approach are the best guides in this respect. The measures that have already been taken by the Council should be adequately appraised and a collective effort made to increase their practical effect. The proposed new steps must be effective and commensurate with the task of enhancing the efficiency of the Council.

The Russian Federation will continue to make a constructive contribution to the deliberations of the Working Group so that broad agreement can be reached. Such agreement will be necessary if the issue of Security Council enlargement is to be practically resolved in a way that can withstand the test of time.

Mr. Sotirov (Bulgaria): Let me first thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on item 38. The Bulgarian delegation attaches great importance to the question of Security Council reform and welcomes your willingness to dedicate to it a number of plenary meetings in one of the Assembly's busiest weeks before the conclusion of the main part of its present session. Bulgaria is one of those Member States that do not themselves stand to gain from the reform. Nevertheless, we are willing to contribute to the improvement in the way in which this Organization works and would like to see its role in world affairs restored and strengthened.

In the Open-ended Working Group, my delegation has repeatedly expressed its views on the various aspects of the reform. Therefore, I will confine myself to providing a brief reminder of our positions.

Bulgaria would favour an expansion of the Security Council in both categories as a more adequate way of reflecting the changes in the world since the end of the Second World War. The expansion by five additional seats, in both the permanent and non-permanent membership, bringing the total number of members to the mid-twenties, would restore balance and would add more credibility and legitimacy to Council decisions. One of the additional non-permanent seats should be allocated to the Eastern European regional Group, bringing its total number of non-permanent seats in an expanded Council to two. I would like to point out that, in the view of this delegation, introducing into our debate ideas for additional categories of membership is not productive, as it dilutes and complicates the reform exercise.

We believe that the curtailment of the use of the veto is essential for the effectiveness of the Security Council's work and that this can be achieved without introducing amendments to the Charter. Permanent members of the Council should be mindful of the fact that they are acting on behalf of the Organization as a whole and should exercise the veto only when they consider the issue in question to be of vital importance. With regard to the application of the veto, a number of exclusion clauses should be agreed upon and applied. The future new members of the Council should be entitled to the same prerogatives as the present permanent members, including a curtailed right of veto. It is encouraging in this respect that during the debate in the Working Group, the aspirant countries joined their voices to the appeal for a more restricted use of the veto.

Bulgaria fully subscribes to the opinion that a periodic review of the Security Council's decision-making process is a vital tool for accountability and for ensuring responsible performance. The review process should be transparent and comprehensive, addressing all elements of the Council's activities.

Finally, after a six-year debate in the Working Group, we are convinced that it is high time for all of us to try to bridge the existing gap that prevents us from making tangible progress. Our delegation is ready to contribute to any initiative credibly aimed at laying the grounds for a possible compromise. We encourage the President of the General Assembly to proceed both with the debate in the Working Group and with informal consultations, especially with the permanent members of the Council and groups of like-minded countries. He can count on our support in this endeavour.

In conclusion, let me express, on behalf of the delegation of Bulgaria, our appreciation for the activities of the Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform and of its Chairman, Mr. Didier Opertti, and Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador Hans Dahlgren and Ambassador John de Saram, for their devotion and the remarkable manner in which they have conducted the deliberations of the Working Group.

Mr. Mbaya (Kenya): I acknowledge the opening remarks by the President, and thank him for convening this plenary meeting to continue the dialogue and debate on the reform of the Security Council.

It is now more than six years since the General Assembly started considering the issue of the reform of the Security Council. Many delegations have articulated their positions during that period, and the various positions are therefore very well known by now. My delegation is convinced that the time has come for the General Assembly to engage in more in-depth and frank negotiations on this issue. In their contribution to the debate, the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Group have made concrete proposals in an effort to move the process forward. The time has come for the others to do so.

My delegation was heartened by the decision, expressed by the President in his introductory remarks, to let this debate go on, despite the apparent slow progress. We commend him for that decision. My delegation is also encouraged by his undertaking to allow the Working Group to continue with its work early in the year 2000. On that score, too, he has my delegation's full support.

An analysis of the work of the Security Council in the last 10 years clearly demonstrates the urgent need for reform. The different responses by the Council to situations in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Somalia, Sierra Leone and East Timor, to name a few, expose the inadequacies in the Council's present structure and working methods. We continue to witness a situation in which the authority of the Security Council is gradually being eroded. Yet there is no evidence of action from within the Council itself, or, indeed, from the United Nations membership, to address this problem. This development could lead to the weakening of the very system that has maintained international peace and security for the past 50 years.

My delegation is of the view that any reform of the Security Council should take into account the diverse character of the United Nations membership and consequently reflect an equitable geographical representation. It is a serious anomaly, for example, that Africa, with 53 member countries, has no permanent seat on the Council, even though the continent provides nearly one third of the United Nations membership.

Africa's position on the reform of the Security Council was formulated by the heads of State at the 1993 Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Cairo, where they categorically called for the expansion of the Security Council by at least 11 seats. My delegation fully supports this position and reiterates that Africa must have two permanent and five non-permanent seats in the Council.

In an attempt to ensure a speedy reform of the Security Council and recognizing the difficulties involved in the ongoing negotiations, the Non-Aligned Movement has come up with a position that would in the meantime ensure a horizontal expansion of the Council. We hope that this position will receive support from all those delegations that have committed themselves to a Security Council for the twenty-first century — a Security Council that is transparent, reflective of the principles of democracy and which espouses the values of fair play and respect for the membership of the Organization.

On the question of the veto, we cannot do better than to recall the position of the Non-Aligned Movement, which reiterates our commitment to actively promote its curtailment by limiting its use to actions taken under Chapter VII of the Charter. We wish to reiterate that, if the veto has to be retained in any shape or form, the

privilege must be extended to all new members without discrimination.

We welcome the progress made so far with respect to the working methods of the Council and particularly the increasing resort to open debates on issues of topical importance. The open meetings provide non-members with the opportunity to participate and contribute to the work of the Council. It gives the members of the General Assembly the opportunity to dialogue with the Council on matters of international peace and security. The debates have demonstrated the inextricable interrelationship between international peace and security on the one hand and development on the other, the latter being the preserve of the General Assembly.

But as indicated by previous speakers, notably the representative of Ireland, draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly after such meetings should reflect the input of participating non-members of the Security Council. Furthermore, there should be a deliberate effort in subsequent actions of the Security Council to incorporate the views of the United Nations membership. The United Nations needs to be more transparent, as do all of its other associated organs.

In conclusion, we believe that the Security Council continues to play a crucial role in the maintenance of international peace and security. On the eve of the new millennium, we have the golden opportunity to revitalize it, to make it more democratic and to enhance its effectiveness and legitimacy in order to reflect the universal character of the Organization.

Mr. Mbanefo (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

With political will and some flexibility on the part of delegations on the core issues, we can reach agreement on this vital issue of reform of the Council. History will judge us very harshly if we let this opportunity pass by. We owe it to the next millennium to democratize the Council.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform will begin its new session at the dawn of the third millennium. We urge all States Members of the United Nations to resume the debate in a new spirit, giving priority to the interests of the international community and to the principles of the Charter.

If we wish to have a new world order built on democracy, the United Nations must be the entity embodying that order, and therefore United Nations bodies must undergo democratic reform. However, United Nations reform will be meaningless if it is not accompanied by reform of the Security Council, the organ entrusted by the membership of the United Nations with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Security Council reform has two interrelated aspects: expansion of its membership and reform of its methods of work. The Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held at Durban in September 1998 stressed that the expansion and reform of the Security Council must be an indivisible part of a common and complementary process that takes into account the principles of sovereign equality among States and equitable geographic distribution, as well as the need for transparency, accountability and democracy in the working methods of the Security Council, including decision-making therein.

My delegation therefore hopes that these aspects of reform — expansion and reform of the working methods of the Council — will be given equal importance in future meetings of the Working Group. We believe that the crisis facing the Security Council, beginning with the United States of America's hegemony over the Council following the end of the cold war and its exploitation of Council mechanisms to attain narrow political objectives, has created an even more pressing need for reform of the working methods of the Security Council. This is the way to ensure a more democratic Security Council that functions in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Allow me to mention some shortcomings and imbalances in the work of the Security Council that have led to a loss of its credibility. We hope that the Working Group will take these observations into account, as they reflect the way in which the Security Council has dealt with the situation in Iraq from 1990 to date.

First, the Security Council has become a cover for the perpetration of crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. There is no doubt that the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1990 run counter to the principles of the Charter and to those of international law and international humanitarian law and to all the principles and conventions on human rights. According to the latest report of the United Nations Children's

Fund, these sanctions have led to the death of half a million Iraqi children under the age of 5 and of many more people, including women and the elderly. This crime of genocide continues, because the United States of America exploits the sanctions in order to change the political regime in Iraq and in order to exact revenge on the Iraqi people. In the most recent example, it forced the Security Council to adopt resolution 1284 (1999). It is a defective and deceptive resolution. It places further restrictions on Iraq and puts off the lifting of sanctions until some indefinite time in the future. Essentially, it rewrites previous Council resolutions. The Working Group must look into means of preventing mechanisms of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter being used to perpetrate crimes of genocide.

Secondly, the Security Council has abnegated its responsibility for putting an end to crimes of aggression and for holding the perpetrators of such crimes to account. Since 1991 the United States of America and Great Britain have imposed two no-fly zones over Iraq. They have used military force against Iraq without a mandate from the Council. To date, those two countries have flown more than 300,000 military sorties over Iraq. They have continuously bombarded civilian installations, in addition to carrying out the two aggressions of 1993, the aggression of 1996 and the aggression on 16 to 20 December of last year. Iraq regularly and continuously informs the Council of these acts of aggression. The Council is unable to take any measure to put an end to such aggression or to hold the perpetrators to account.

It is ironic that the United States and Great Britain, while strongly pushing for the adoption of resolution 1284 (1999) and supporting 49 previous resolutions against Iraq, also put forward a text demanding respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. Before the ink was dry on resolution 1284 (1999), the United States and Great Britain breached it by carrying out aggression against Iraq. Indeed the Permanent Representative of Britain, the President of the Security Council for this month, declared to an Arab newspaper, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, on 19 December that the United States and Great Britain do not require a Security Council resolution in order to impose the no-fly zones. Is it possible to imagine worse contempt for the principles of the Charter?

This very week two scientists, from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, and Jacksonville State University in the state of Alabama in the United States, during a meeting with British parliamentarians said that the use of depleted uranium is a crime against humanity. The United States and Britain have used 300 tons of this radioactive weapons against Iraq under the cover of implementing Security Council resolution 678 (1991). We therefore call on the Working Group to look into this serious matter.

Thirdly, Security Council procedures have been abused to spy on Iraq and to falsify facts. What has been uncovered regarding the practices of the United Nations Special Commission and its officials truly requires a serious reaction. The Commission spied on Iraq for the United States and Israel. The Commission operated chemical and biological laboratories in Baghdad with the objective of falsifying facts. The Commission published deceptive reports on Iraq's cooperation in order to prolong the sanctions and to justify aggression against Iraq. All of this took place over eight and a half years under the very nose of the international community. Now, is it not time to look into ways and means to prevent a subsidiary body of the Security Council being turned into an organ of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Mossad? In the absence of such measures, States cannot be sure that those wearing United Nations blue helmets are indeed international civil servants and not spies posing a grave threat to the national security of such States.

Fourthly, the Security Council has now become the ultimate example of double standards. There are many examples of this fact. They stretch from Iraq to Palestine, to Libya, to the Sudan, to Kosovo, to Rwanda, to East Timor — and the list is getting longer. Indeed, double standards have now been extended to how particular paragraphs in a given resolution are considered. For example, while Iraq was asked to implement resolution 687 (1991), the Security Council, in a procedure unprecedented in its arbitrariness, continues to completely ignore paragraph 14, which is part of the very same resolution. The reason is that the Council fears raising the issue of weapons of mass destruction that Israel possesses. These weapons gravely threaten Arab national security as well as international peace and security.

Fifthly, the Security Council has ignored fundamental principles of the Charter, including the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States. Iraq has sent numerous letters to the Council pointing out the fact that in 1998 the United States adopted a domestic law regarding the liberation of Iraq. We also drew the Council's attention to the United States declaration that it had begun to train groups of Iraqi

nationals as mercenaries at its military bases, in order to carry out acts of terrorism inside Iraq.

The news of such flagrant intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq and of preparations for carrying out acts of terrorism on Iraqi territory were met with complete inaction on the part of the Security Council. This was because the party at which the complaints were directed — the United States of America, which has hegemony over the Council — is the judge and jury in the Council. Were the United States to accuse a State of perpetrating but one tenth of what it has perpetrated against Iraq, then we would immediately see missiles, smart and dumb alike, raining down on that other State's cities and villages. Indeed, that State would immediately be added to the list of States that supposedly support terrorism, and sanctions would be imposed on it.

We cite such examples for the consideration of the Working Group in its debate on reforming the working methods of the Security Council. Our objective is to reaffirm the international responsibility of the Security Council as an institution and as a Charter-mandated organ and to prevent its abuse as a political tool of the foreign policy of any State. To that end, my country, Iraq, will continue to resist United States hegemony over the Security Council and to defend the interests of our people and of humanity.

Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal): After birth and development, review and reform are the inevitable stages of any institution's life if it is to continue to sustain its credible service to and address the dynamic requirements of the peoples it is created to serve. This is even more true when it comes to an institution as universal as the United Nations. The pain of labour that preceded the birth of this Organization is still fresh in many minds, as are the progress and strides made in the five decades of tides and troughs that have shaped its development and brought it to an age ripe enough for it to deserve a comprehensive review and reform aimed at sustaining and enhancing the authority, legitimacy and credibility of the Organization into the next century.

We believe it was with this dynamic of nature and felt need in mind that we eagerly adopted resolution 48/26 six years ago, establishing an Open-ended Working Group to consider all aspects of the question of increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. The Security Council is not only one of the principal organs of the United Nations; it is our Organization's most vital organ in the maintenance of international peace and security. It is the executive and enforcement arm of the United Nations. Therefore, no United Nations reform will be worth the name if we cannot reform the Security Council in its composition and functioning alike. Reform of the United Nations in general hinges on the reform of the Security Council.

Despite this strong need for change, the past six years of our collective exercise on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council have borne no substantial fruit. Nevertheless, the exercise has been revealing on many accounts, which are well documented in the Working Group's reports, and has contributed to a better understanding of the forces of pressure and resistance among the membership.

Reform is a continuing process and cannot therefore be worked out on prescribed time limits, as we believe that the reform of the Security Council will be neither meaningful nor complete unless we arrive at a ratifiable global consensus on the composition and functioning of a reformed Security Council. Nepal, as a modern democracy, has accepted the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter as a basic plank of its foreign policy and we cannot think of making this intergovernmental Organization more removed from the ideals, values and culture of a democratic institution. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nepal supports the common position on the question of Security Council reform reached at the Durban summit of the Movement.

Nepal believes in the primacy of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. In the exercise of its power, the Council must uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter, be democratic in its composition and transparent in its functioning and never endeavour to curtail the authority of the General Assembly, the most democratic of all United Nations bodies.

The delegation of Nepal hopes that the next round of the Open-ended Working Group's exercise will result in some concrete progress. Time is running out as we approach the new millennium. The new millennium being not only an accident of time but basically a frame of mind, any further delay or failure in Security Council reform may be construed as a mark of an organic unpreparedness of the United Nations to step into the next century with a full measure of authority, legitimacy, credibility and mission.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): The attainment of the objective of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council is long overdue. Six years of hard work in the Working Group have yet to produce a concrete and universally acceptable formula to effect the desired reform.

There has, however, been some movement forward, although not as rapidly as many of us would have desired. Following six years of extensive and substantive deliberations, most of the key elements of reform have become clear or less ambiguous. There is already consensus on a number of important aspects or principles of reform which, among other things, include, first, the need to reform the composition and functioning of the Security Council; secondly, the need to make the Security Council more equitably representative by increasing its members; thirdly, the need to improve the working methods and the decision-making process of the Security Council towards greater openness and transparency; and, finally, the need to consider all aspects of reform as an integrated package, including the consideration of the question of the veto.

However, a considerable divergence of views on certain other aspects of the reform still exits, especially in respect of such questions as permanent membership expansion, the size of an enlarged Council, methods of selecting new permanent members and, finally, the problem of the veto right of both the current and prospective permanent members.

Clearly, what is lacking is not ideas and proposals, but the necessary political will to achieve the common objective. What is required is a clear commitment and manifestation of this political will, without which the entire undertaking will risk becoming increasingly an exercise in futility. This is the point that the President of the General Assembly himself stressed in his opening remarks on this agenda item.

Malaysia's position on Security Council reform has been made amply clear in our previous statements on the subject in the General Assembly and in the Working Group. We continue to believe in the need for a comprehensive reform of the Council. We continue to advocate the enlargement of the Council's membership, commensurate with the substantial increase in the number of members of the United Nations, the majority of which are from the developing world. The size of enlargement of a restructured Security Council should best reflect the need for enhanced representation of this particular group of countries.

Malaysia considers the veto to be one of the most undemocratic features of the Security Council. Much of the impasse in the Council has to do with this aspect of the decision-making process. The issue of the veto ought to be addressed seriously and exhaustively, not cursorily and perfunctorily. We should seriously consider how best it should be modified, circumscribed or diluted in consonance with the present realities and to pave the way towards its eventual elimination. Needless to say, a positive and constructive attitude of the permanent members of the Security Council will be crucial if this issue is to be addressed effectively. Malaysia stands by the position of the Non-Aligned Movement that this anachronistic decision-making mechanism should be applied, if necessary, only to actions taken under Chapter VII of the Charter and that it should be modified and eventually eliminated. An objective assessment in the discussion of this question in the Working Group only points to the universally accepted view that the exercise of the veto should be curtailed as part of the reform package.

Malaysia also attaches great importance to the need to improve further the effectiveness and transparency of the work of the Council. We note that significant progress has been made in the discussions on a number of reform measures under cluster II. We believe that at the core of these discussions is the importance of enhancing the process of consultations between the Council and States that are directly involved in particular issues, in accordance with the provisions of Articles 31 and 32 of the Charter. Such direct consultations and interactions will certainly contribute to improving the decision-making process of the Council.

At the same time, my delegation supports more frequent open debates and formal private meetings of the Council. We also welcome the innovative format of interactive open meetings of the Council, as was initiated by the United Kingdom presidency last Wednesday. The frequent holding of more meetings in these formats will go a long way towards making the Council more transparent and accessible to the larger membership of the United Nations, on whose behalf the Council carries out its Charter-mandated responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The reform process is indeed a complex and challenging undertaking affecting the vital interests of all Member States. Nevertheless, the challenges of reform must be met to ensure the continued viability and relevance of our Organization, in particular the Security Council. We must now face the challenge of examining further different aspects of Council reform and expedite the process of putting together the necessary outline of a reform package that could be developed and refined to meet the general agreement stipulated in resolution 53/30. The points of convergence among us must therefore continue to be consolidated and strengthened while we work to bridge the remaining gaps towards a compromise solution. The task is not insurmountable if there is political will to carry the process forward to its logical conclusion.

The upcoming discussion in the Working Group must therefore propel this process forward, if interest on this subject is to be sustained. My delegation believes that unless we address this question in a constructive and progressive manner and manifest the necessary political will to move on to serious negotiations on a final package, we run the real risk of deepening further the current impasse, thereby increasing the creeping sense of cynicism and pessimism among Member States. That would be detrimental to the entire reform process.

We must remind ourselves that this exercise cannot go on indefinitely. It will have to come to a stop sooner or later. The large number of delegations speaking on this item at this session of the General Assembly reflects a continuing active interest in the reform of the Security Council. We hope that this active interest will also be manifested in the upcoming Working Group discussions. We would, however, urge a further manifestation of greater flexibility on the part of Member States than has been shown thus far if we are to make any progress.

My delegation would encourage you, Mr. President, as current Chairman of the Working Group, to use the prestige and prerogatives of your office, as well as your considerable diplomatic skills and experience, to re-energize the process and to seek further progress in our work on this highly charged question. We look forward to the continued good work of the two Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador John de Saram of Sri Lanka and Ambassador Hans Dahlgren of Sweden, at the upcoming sessions of the Working Group. We urge them to reinject the sense of urgency and dynamism that once characterized the discussions in the Working Group, with, of course, the cooperation of all Member States.

The progress made, or lack of it, during the upcoming session may well determine the fate of the Working Group.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.